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IF THE SOUTH HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO GO

BY ERNEST CROSBY.

MR. JOHN MORLEY, in his *Life of Mr. Gladstone*, expresses the opinion that his hero's sympathy with the South during our Civil War was the greatest mistake of his career. Whether or not Mr. Gladstone's sympathy with the South was a mistake depends, it seems to me, on the character of the motives which determined his choice. If it was a kindly feeling for slavery that influenced him, of course it was a mistake. If it was a lurking fondness for the lazy, useless life of the Southern aristocracy,—for the life of a class like his own, whose boast it was that it lived on the labor of others,—then too it was a mistake. But it is possible to take another view of the issue. In the late fifties and early sixties, the North and South hated each other bitterly. I was brought up in the midst of that hatred and partook of it; and I remember suggesting, as a small boy, when Jefferson Davis was captured, that he be taken through the streets of our cities on exhibition in an iron cage. Our favorite song devoted him to death by hanging on a sour-apple tree. As for the Southerners, they could find no words vile enough to describe their fellow citizens of the North, "Northern scum" being one of the commonest and most polite.

Here, then, is the ethical proposition. We have two neighbors living in partnership and hating each other with a deadly hatred, and one of them desires to separate peaceably from the other. There was no practical difficulty in the way of making a division, for the cleavage ran along geographical lines, and any Master-in-Chancery would have been obliged to report that an actual partition was perfectly feasible. Given this state of affairs, was it morally justifiable for the stronger partner to hold the other to his side by force? This is no constitutional question, for it rises far above the plane of seals and parchment. Indeed, nothing

obscures moral investigations so much as the dragging in by the heels of artificial and unnatural considerations. The simple issue was: Is it right to hold haters together by force? If Mr. Gladstone decided this question in the negative, I, for one, do not see how he could reasonably have done otherwise.

What was the psychological condition of the Northern mind, that the preference should be given to it? It was filled with hatred, as we have seen; and, where it did not hate, it was still bent upon having its own way. If we except an inconsiderable number of Abolitionists, the question of slavery did not affect the attitude of the North. It was only the South that was preoccupied with slavery. President Lincoln said again and again that the war was undertaken for the sole purpose of preserving the Union, and that he would preserve it, either free, or slave, or part free and part slave. He called out the troops to maintain the Union, and not to abolish slavery. The slaves were finally freed, as a war measure, to assist the armies in the field. The war was not designed to help emancipation, but emancipation to help the war. And what was this "Union" for which so many lives were sacrificed and in honor of which so much poetry was written? In the last analysis, it was the forcible binding together of mutual haters, and its idealization was a curious example of fetish-worship. Apart from sentiment the practical element in the Union spirit was the desire to preserve the size of the country; it was devotion to the idea of bigness, and the belief that bigness is a matter of latitude and longitude,—the same spirit which prevailed in the Mexican and Philippine wars,—in other words, the spirit of Imperialism. It is impossible of course to extract any moral essence from a mere matter of geographical extension, and it is hardly necessary to point out that the greatest civilizations of the past, those of Athens and Jerusalem and Florence, were restricted to narrow areas.

The utilitarian question of results does not properly enter into an ethical inquiry, but it is still interesting to guess what the upshot of peaceful Secession might have been. That the South would have suffered from its new commercial isolation cannot be doubted; and that the States of the Confederation would have quarrelled is almost equally certain, for hard times make hard tempers. It is easy to predict, then, that a nation built upon the principle of free secession would not have remained long intact.

It is very clear, too, that slavery could not have lasted long along the Northern border; for, even before the war, with the fugitive-slave law in full operation, a continual stream of escaping slaves found its way across the intervening States to Canada. If nothing but an ordinary boundary-line had separated the slave States from free soil, a general exodus of slaves would have begun, and ere long the border States would of necessity have ceased to be slave States. With slavery extinct, the reason for their separation from the North would have ceased, and their commercial interests would have demanded reunion with the United States, while the kindly action of the North in permitting them to secede without interference would have left no hostile feelings in their minds to prevent such a reunion. With the border States once annexed, a new boundary would have been created along their southern frontier, and here again history would repeat itself, until the nation was again one. I do not think that such an outcome of Secession is fanciful, and its realization would have been hastened by the growing impatience of the civilized world with the continuance of chattel-slavery.

Against this natural evolution of the race difficulty what have we actually to set? Slavery was, indeed, abolished; but it is altogether impossible to sum up the evils which we have entailed upon ourselves by the manner of its abolition. First of all, we have the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and all the grief and suffering consequent upon that loss. It is a common remark that the wars of Napoleon permanently injured the physique of the French people by killing off the strongest men. Is it not likely that we have suffered to some extent in the same way? Then, how much money did the war cost? And how much more wisely it might have been expended! Furthermore, consider our disgraceful annual pension-bill, which, larger than the cost of any European standing-army, is, I believe, actually increasing, and which seems to have transformed the brave hosts of the North into an army of mendicants! And into that mendicancy who shall say how much fraud has entered? Indeed, the moral effects of the war were its worst effects. I have seen it stated that discharged soldiers founded our army of tramps, a name which has come into use in my time. Do not think that these are the imaginations of a fanatic who sees in history only that which he looks for. In the *Century Magazine* for November, 1903, is an

article on "The Present Epidemic of Crime," by the Rev. Dr. James M. Buckley, one of the best-known Methodist clergymen in the country. At the very head of the causes of this "Epidemic," he places the great war. "Among the influences which have powerfully affected the primary causes of crime, and are sources of this present epidemic is the effect of the Civil War. . . . The evil done by that war to public and private morality was almost irremediable. Its effects were seen upon Congress, upon politics, upon reconstruction, upon business, upon society, and upon the habits of the people."

One of the worst results of the Civil War was the resuscitation of the spirit of war and Imperialism. Is it a wonder that children brought up in an atmosphere of hate and bloodshed should have had the spirit of hate and bloodshed infused into their hearts? The seed sown then duly bore its crop, and "Remember the 'Maine'!" (a vessel which all the world but America believes to have been destroyed by accident) was the direct offspring of "The Union Forever!" The Cuban War, waged for the independence of Cuba, (which could have been obtained, according to our Secretary of State and our Minister to Spain, without a shot), and the Philippine War, waged for the purpose of depriving a brave people of their freedom, are the legitimate twin offspring of the Civil War.

The speculation caused by the interruption of commerce and the derangement of the currency during our war laid the foundations of the new plutocracy. Money was needed to pay the enormous expenses of destruction, and the tariff began to grow, and behind it monopoly ensconced itself. With the new tramp came the new multi-millionaire, with caste, luxury, pauperism and labor troubles in their train. It would be possible to write a large and plausible volume, tracing the origin of almost all the pressing evils of the day to the Civil War. Was the forcing of the issue of the abolition of slavery a few years before its time worth while at such a cost?

This brings us to the sad fact that the war did not settle the race question, but merely aggravated it. Slavery was wrong and should have come to an end, but we ended it in the wrong way. The real trouble with the South at present is, that the question of slavery was settled over the heads of the inhabitants by a hostile and hated power. No people could at heart accept such a settle-

ment with good grace, and it is not to be expected of human nature. We stabbed the South to the quick, and during all the years of reconstruction turned the dagger round in the festering wound. The spirit of war and Imperialism has never yet settled any question, except the question as to which side is the stronger; and now, after forty years, we are beginning to learn that the negro has yet to be emancipated. If the South had been permitted to secede, slavery would have died a natural death, the Southerners would have felt that they had consented to its demise, and they would have accepted the new order with that attitude of acquiescence which is necessary to the success of any social experiment. We have still at this late day to learn the ancient lesson of Buddha: "Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love; this is an old rule."

The wisest thing that was said by any Northerner at the outbreak of the war was the saying usually ascribed to Horace Greeley: "Let the erring sisters go." Mr. Whitelaw Reid has loyally endeavored to defend his former chief from this ascription, and he declares that Mr. Greeley never used the words. If Mr. Reid is speaking solely in the interests of historical accuracy, well and good; but if he is stretching a point to save his friend, he is doing him a doubtful service, for the final historian of the Civil War will have to record that these were the words, and the only words, of wisdom. If Mr. Gladstone echoed them in the spirit in which they were uttered, he was right, and Mr. Morley should reconsider his judgment.

ERNEST CROSBY.